

THE INDIAN DRUM

By William MacHarg and Edwin Balmer

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HENRY SPEARMAN

SYNOPSIS.—Wealthy and highly placed in the Chicago business world, Benjamin Corvet is something of a recluse and a mystery to his associates. After a stormy interview with his partner, Henry Spearman, Corvet seeks Constance Sherrill, daughter of his other business partner, Lawrence Sherrill, and secures from her a promise not to marry Spearman. He then disappears. Sherrill learns Corvet has written to a certain Alan Conrad, in Blue Rapids, Kansas, and exhibited strange agitation over the matter. Corvet's letter summons Conrad, a youth of unknown parentage, to Chicago. Alan arrives in Chicago. From a statement of Sherrill it seems probable Corvet is Corvet's illegitimate son. Corvet has decided his house and its contents to Alan, who takes possession. That night Alan discovers a man ransacking the desks and bureau drawers in Corvet's apartments. The appearance of Alan tremendously agitates the intruder, who appears to think him a ghost and raves of "the Miwaka." After a struggle the man escapes.

CHAPTER V.—Continued.

Alan took up his hat and looked about the house; he was going to return and sleep here, of course; he was not going to leave the house unguarded for any long time after this, but, after what had just happened, he felt he could leave it safely for half an hour, particularly if he left a light burning within.

He did this and stepped over to the Sherrills'. The man who answered his ring recognized him at once and admitted him; in reply to Alan's question, the servant said that Mr. Sherrill had not yet returned. When Alan went to his room, the valet appeared and, finding that Alan was packing, the man offered his service. Alan let him pack and went downstairs; a motor had just driven up to the house.

It proved to have brought Constance and her mother; Mrs. Sherrill, after informing Alan that Mr. Sherrill might not return until some time later, went upstairs and did not appear again. Constance followed her mother but, ten minutes later, came downstairs.

"You're not staying here tonight?" she asked.

"I wanted to say to your father," Alan explained, "that I believe I had better go over to the other house."

"Are you taking any one with you?" she inquired.

"Any one?"
"A servant, I mean."
"No."

"Then you'll let us lend you a man from here."

"You're awfully good; but I don't think I'll need anyone tonight. Mr. Corvet's—my father's man—is coming back tomorrow, I understand. I'll get along very well until then."

She was silent a moment as she looked away. Her shoulders suddenly jerked a little. "I wish you'd take some one with you," she persisted. "I don't like to think of you alone over there."

"My father must have been often alone there."

"Yes," she said. "Yes." She looked at him quickly, then away, checking a question. She wanted to ask, he knew, what he had discovered in that lonely house which had so agitated him; for

"You're Not Staying Here Tonight?" She Asked.

of course she had noticed agitation in him. And he had intended to tell her, or, rather, her father. He had been rehearsing to himself the description of the man he had met there in order to ask Sherrill about him; but now Alan knew that he was not going to refer the matter even to Sherrill just yet.

Sherrill had believed that Benjamin Corvet's disappearance was from circumstances too personal and intimate to be made a subject of public inquiry; and what Alan had encountered in Corvet's house had confirmed that be-

lief. Sherrill further had said that Benjamin Corvet, if he had wished Sherrill to know those circumstances, would have told them to him; but Corvet had not done that; instead, he had sent for Alan, his son. He had given his son his confidence.

Sherrill had admitted that he was withholding from Alan, for the time being, something that he knew about Benjamin Corvet; it was nothing, he had said, which would help Alan to learn about his father, or what had become of him; but perhaps Sherrill, not knowing these other things, could not speak accurately as to that. Alan determined to ask Sherrill what he had been withholding, before he told him all of what had happened in Corvet's house. There was one other circumstance which Sherrill had mentioned but not explained; it occurred to Alan now.

"Miss Sherrill—" he checked himself.

"What is it?"

"This afternoon your father said that you believed that Mr. Corvet's disappearance was in some way connected with you; he said that he did not think that was so; but do you want to tell me why you thought it?"

"Yes; I will tell you." She colored quickly. "One of the last things Mr. Corvet did—in fact, the last thing we know of his doing before he sent for you—was to come to me and warn me against one of my friends."

"Warn you, Miss Sherrill? How? I mean, warn you against what?"

"Against thinking too much of him."

She turned away.

"I think I'll come to see your father in the morning," Alan said, when Constance looked back to him.

"But you'll come over here for breakfast in the morning?"

"You want me?"

"Certainly."

"I'd like to come very much."

"Then I'll expect you." She followed him to the door when he had put on his things, and he made no objection when she asked that the man be allowed to carry his bag around to the other house.

When he had dismissed Simons and re-entered the house on Astor street, he found no evidences of any disturbance while he had been gone. On the second floor, to the east of the room which had been his father's, was a bedroom which evidently had been kept as a guest chamber; Alan carried his suitcase there and made ready for bed.

The sight of Constance Sherrill standing and watching after him in concern as he started back to this house, came to him again and again, and, also, her flush when she had spoken of the friend against whom Benjamin Corvet had warned her. Who was he? It had been impossible at that moment for Alan to ask her more; besides, if he had asked and she had told him, he would have learned only a name which he could not place yet in any connection with her or with Benjamin Corvet. Whoever he was, it was plain that Constance Sherrill "thought of him," lucky man, Alan said to himself. Yet Corvet had warned her not to think of him.

Alan turned back his bed. It had been for him a tremendous day. Barely twelve hours before he had come to that house, Alan Conrad from Blue Rapids, Kan., now . . . phrases from what Lawrence Sherrill had told him of his father were running through his mind as he opened the door of the room to be able to hear any noise in Benjamin Corvet's house, of which he was sole protector. The emotion roused by his first sight of the lake went through him again as he opened the window to the east.

Now—he was in bed—he seemed to be standing, a spectator before a man blaspheming Benjamin Corvet and the souls of men dead. "And the lake above the eye! . . . The bullet got you! . . . So it's you that got Ben! . . . I'll get you! . . . You can't save the Miwaka!"

The Miwaka! The stir of that name was stronger now even than before; it had been running through his consciousness almost constantly since he had heard it. He jumped up and turned on the light and found a pencil. He did not know how to spell the name and it was not necessary to write it down; the name had taken on that definiteness and ineffaceableness of a thing which, once heard, can never again be forgotten. But, in panic that he might forget, he wrote it, guessing at the spelling—"Miwaka."

It was a name, of course; but the name of what? It repeated and repeated itself to him, after he got back into bed, until its very iteration made him drowsy.

Outside, the gale whistled and shrieked. The wind, passing its last resistless after its sweep across the prairies before it leaped upon the lake, battered and clamored in its assault about the house. But Alan became a sleeper; he heard it no longer as it rattled the windows and howled under the eaves and over the roof, but as out on the lake, above the roaring and ice-crunching waves, it whipped and circled with its chill the ice-shrouded sides of struggling ships. So, with the roar of surf and gale in his ears, he

went to sleep with the sole conscious connection in his mind between himself and these people, among whom Benjamin Corvet's summons had brought him, the one name "Miwaka."

CHAPTER VI.

The Deed in Trust.

Memory, if Alan could call it that, had given him a feeling for ships and for the lake. But these recollections were only what those of a three-years' child might have been. Not only did they refuse to connect themselves with anything else, but by the very finality of their isolation, they warned him that they—and perhaps a few more vague memories of similar sort—were all that recollection ever would give him. He caught himself together and turned his thoughts to the approaching visit to Sherrill—and his father's offices. He had accepted Constance Sherrill's invitation to drive him downtown to his destination.

Observing the towering buildings to his right, he was able to identify some of the more prominent structures, familiar from photographs of the city. Constance drove swiftly a few blocks



Sherrill Opened a Drawer and Took Out a Large, Plain Envelope.

down this boulevard; then, with a sudden, "Here we are!" she shot the car to the curb and stopped. She led Alan into one of the tallest and best-looking buildings.

On several of the doors opening upon the wide marble hall where the elevator left them, Alan saw the names, "Corvet, Sherrill and Spearman."

Constance led the way on past to a door farther down the corridor, which bore merely the name, "Lawrence Sherrill"; evidently Sherrill, who had interests aside from the shipping business, had offices connected with it, but not actually a part of the offices of Corvet, Sherrill and Spearman. A girl on guard at the door, saying that Mr. Sherrill had been awaiting Mr. Conrad, opened an inner door and led Alan into a large, many-windowed room, where Sherrill was sitting alone before a table-desk. He pulled the "visitor's chair" rather close to his desk and to his own big leather chair before asking Alan to sit himself.

"You wanted to tell me, or ask me, something last night, my daughter has told me," Sherrill said cordially. "I'm sorry I wasn't home when you came back."

"I wanted to ask you, Mr. Sherrill," Alan said, "about those facts in regard to Mr. Corvet which you mentioned to me yesterday but did not explain. You said it would not aid me to know them; but I found certain things in Mr. Corvet's house last night which made me want to know, if I could, everything you could tell me."

Sherrill opened a drawer and took out a large, plain envelope.

"On the day after your father disappeared," he said, "but before I knew he was gone—or before any one except my daughter felt any alarm about him—I received a short note from him. The note was agitated, almost incoherent. It told me he had sent for you—Alan Conrad, of Blue Rapids, Kansas—

—but spoke of you as though you were some one I ought to have known about, and commended you to my care. The remainder of it was merely an agitated, almost indecipherable farewell to me. When I opened the envelope, a key had fallen out. The note made no reference to the key, but, comparing it with one I had in my pocket, I saw that it appeared to be a key to a safety deposit box in the vaults of a company where we both had boxes."

"The note, taken in connection with my daughter's alarm about him, made it so plain that something serious had happened to Corvet, that my first thought was merely for him. Corvet was not a man with whom one could readily connect the thought of suicide; but, Alan, that was the idea I had. I hurried at once to his house, but the bell was not answered, and I could not get in. His servant, Wassaquan, has

very few friends, and the few times he has been away from home of recent years have been when he visited an acquaintance of his—the head porter in a South Side hotel. I went to the telephone in the house next door and called the hotel and found Wassaquan there. I told him over the telephone only that something was wrong, and hurried to my own home to get the key, which I had, to the Corvet house; but when I came back and let myself into the house, I found it empty and with no sign of anything having happened."

"The next morning, Alan, I went to the safe deposit vaults as soon as they were open. I presented the numbered key and was told that it belonged to a box rented by Corvet, and that Corvet had arranged about three days before for me to have access to the box if I presented the key. I had only to sign my name in their book and open the box. In it, Alan, I found the pictures of you which I showed you yesterday and the very strange communications that I am going to show you now."

Sherrill opened the long envelope, from which several thin, folded papers fell. He picked up the largest of these, which consisted of several sheets fastened together with a clip, and handed it to Alan without comment. Alan, as he looked at it and turned the pages, saw that it contained two columns of typewriting carried from page to page after the manner of an account.

The column to the left was an inventory of property and profits and income by months and years, and the one to the right was a list of losses and expenditures. Beginning at an indefinite day, or month in the year 1895, there was set down in a lump sum what was indicated as the total of Benjamin Corvet's holdings at that time. To this, in sometimes undated items, the increase had been added. In the opposite column, beginning apparently from the same date in 1895, were the missing man's expenditures.

Alan having ascertained that the papers contained only this account, looked up questioningly to Sherrill; but Sherrill, without speaking, merely handed him the second of the papers. Alan unfolded it and saw that it was a letter written in the same hand which had written the summons he had received in Blue Rapids and had made the entries in the little memorandum book of the remittances that had been sent to John Welton.

It began simply:

"Lawrence—
"This will come to you in the event that I am not able to carry out the plan upon which I am now, at last, determined. You will find with this a list of my possessions. Deeds for all real estate executed and complete except for recording of the transfer at the county office; bonds, certificates, and other documents representing my ownership of properties, together with signed forms for their legal transfer to you, are in this box. These properties, in their entirety, I give to you in trust to hold for the young man now known as Alan Conrad of Blue Rapids, Kan., to deliver any part or all over to him or to continue to hold it all in trust for him as you shall consider to be to his greatest advantage."
"This for the reasons which I shall have told to you or him—I cannot know which one of you now, nor do I know how I shall tell it. But when you learn, Lawrence, think as well of me as you can and help him to be charitable to me."
"With the greatest affection."
"BENJAMIN CORVET."

Alan, as he finished reading, looked up to Sherrill, bewildered and dazed.

"What does it mean, Mr. Sherrill? Does it mean that he has gone away and left everything he had—everything to me?"

"If Mr. Corvet does not return, and I do not receive any other instructions, I shall take over his estate, as he has instructed, for your advantage."

"And Mr. Sherrill, he didn't tell you why? This is all you know?"

"Yes; you have everything now. All we can do, Alan, is to search for him in every way we can. There will be others searching for him too now; for information of his disappearance has got out. There have been reporters at the office this morning making inquiries, and his disappearance will be in the afternoon papers."

Sherrill put the papers back in their envelope, and the envelope back into the drawer, which he relocked.

"I went over all this with Mr. Spearman this morning," he said. "He is as much at a loss to explain it as I am."

He was silent for a few moments.

"The transfer of Mr. Corvet's properties to me for you," he said suddenly, "includes, as you have seen, Corvet's interest in the firm of 'Corvet, Sherrill & Spearman.' I went very carefully through the deeds and transfers in the deposit box, and it was plain that, while he had taken great care with the forms of transfer for all the properties, he had taken particular pains with whatever related to his holdings in this company and to his shipping interests. If I make over the properties to you, Alan, I shall begin with those; for it seems to me that

your father was particularly anxious that you should take a personal as well as a financial place among the men who control the traffic of the lakes. I have told Spearman that this is my intention. He has not been able to see it my way as yet; but he may change his views, I think, after meeting you."

Sherrill got up. Alan arose a little unsteadily. The list of properties he had read and the letter and Sherrill's statement portended so much that its meaning could not all come to him at once. He followed Sherrill through a short private corridor, flanked with files lettered "Corvet, Sherrill, and Spearman," into the large room he had seen when he came in with Constance. They crossed this, and Sherrill, without knocking, opened the door of the office marked, "Mr. Spearman." Alan, looking on past Sherrill as the door opened, saw that there were some half dozen men in the room, smoking and talking. His gaze went swiftly on past these men to the one who, half seated on the top of the flat desk, had been talking to them; and his pulse closed upon his heart with a shock; he started, choked with astonishment, then swiftly forced himself under control. For this was the man whom he had met and whom he had fought in Benjamin Corvet's house the night before—the big man surprised in his blasphemy of Corvet and of souls "in h—!" who, at sight of an apparition with a bullet hole above its eye, had cried out in his fright, "You got Ben! D—n you! D—n you!"

Alan's shoulders drew up slightly, and the muscles of his hands tightened, as Sherrill led him to the man. Sherrill put his hand on the man's shoulder; his other hand was still on Alan's arm.

"Henry," he said to the man, "this is Alan Conrad. Alan, I want you to know my partner, Mr. Spearman."

Spearman nodded an acknowledgment, but did not put out his hand; his eyes—steady, bold, watchful eyes—seemed measuring Alan attentively; and in return Alan, with his gaze, was measuring him.

CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Corvet's Partner.

The instant of meeting, when Alan recognized in Sherrill's partner, the man with whom he had fought in Corvet's house, was one of swift readjustment of all his thought—adjustment to a situation of which he could not even have dreamed, and which left him breathless. But for Spearman, obviously, it was not that. Following his noncommittal nod of acknowledgment of Sherrill's introduction and his first steady scrutiny of Alan, the big, handsome man swung himself off from the desk on which he sat and leaned against it, facing them more directly.

"Oh, yes—Conrad," he said. His tone was hearty; in it Alan could recognize only so much of reserve as might be expected from Sherrill's partner who had taken an attitude of opposition. The shipmasters, looking



Steady, Bold, Watchful Eyes Seemed Measuring Alan Attentively.

on, could see, no doubt, not even that; except for the excitement which Alan himself could not conceal, it must appear to them only an ordinary introduction.

Alan fought sharply down the swift rush of his blood and the tightening of his muscles.

"I can say truly that I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Spearman," he managed.

There was no recognition of anything beyond the mere surface meaning of the words in Spearman's slow smile of acknowledgment, as he turned from Alan to Sherrill.

"You can see why I have to distrust the young fellow who's come to claim Ben Corvet's place."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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